

## Speech of Mr. Jefferson at his inaugural. Washington, March 4, [1801].

SPEECH Of Mr. Jefferson at his Inauguration.

---

(1801)

WASHINGTON, March 4.

*President's Speech.*

THIS DAY At Twelve O'Clock, THOMAS JEFFERSON, *President of the United States.*

Took the oath of office required by the Constitution, in the Senate Chamber, in the presence of the Senate, the Members of the House of Representatives, the Public Officers, and a large concourse of Citizens.

Previously to which he delivered the following ADDRESS.

*Friends and Fellow Citizens ,*

Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow citizens which is here assembled, to express my grateful thanks for the favour with which they have been pleased to look towards me, to declare a sincere consciousness that the task is above my talents, and that I approach it with those anxious and awful presentiments which the greatness of the charge, and the weakness of my powers so justly inspire. A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye; when I contemplate these transcendant objects and see the honour, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation, and humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking. Utterly indeed should I despair, did not the presence of many, whom I here see, remind me, that in the other high authorities provided by our constitution, I shall find resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal, on which to rely under all difficulties. To you, then, gentlemen, who are charged with the sovereign functions of the legislation, and to those associated with you, I look with encouragement for that guidance and support which may enable us to steer with safety the vessel in which we are all embarked, amidst the conflicting elements of a troubled world.

During the contest of opinion through which we have past, the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely, and to speak and to write what they think: but this being now decided by the voice of the nation,

announced according to the rules of the constitution, all will of course arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All too will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and and mind, let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty, and even life itself, are but dreary things. And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little, if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. During the throes and convulsions of the accient world; during the agonizing spasms of infuriate man, seeking through blood and slaughter his long lost liberty, it was not wonderful that the agitation of the billows should reach even this distant and peaceful shore; that this should be more felt and feared by some and less by others; and should divide opinions as to measures of safety; but every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all REPUBLICANS: We are all FEDERALISTS. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated, where reason is left free to combat it. I know indeed that some honest men fear that a republican government cannot be strong enough. But would the honest patriot, in the full?ide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm, on the theoretic and visionary fear, that this government, the world's best hope, may, by possibility, want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest government on earth. I believe it the one, where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern—Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he then be trusted with the government of others. Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

Let us then, with courage and confidence, pursue our own federal and republican principles: our attachment to union and representative government. Kindly separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe; too high minded to endure the degradations of the others, possessing a chosen country, with room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation, entertaining a due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties, to the acquisitions of our own industry, to honor and confidence from our fellow citizens, resulting not from birth, but from our actions and their sense of them, enlightened by a benign religion, professed indeed and practised in various forms, yet all of them inculcating honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude and the love of man, acknowledging and adorning an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here, and

his greatest happiness hereafter; with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one thing more, fellow-citizens, a wife and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government; and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

About to enter, fellow citizens, on the exercise of duties which comprehend every thing dear and valuable to you, it is proper you should understand what I deem the essential principles of our government, and consequently those which ought to shape its administration. I will compress them within the narrowest compass they will bear, stating the general principle, but not all its limitations. Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political;—peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none:—the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns, and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies:—the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigour, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home, and safety abroad:—a jealous care of the right of election by the people, a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided:—absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority, the vital principle of republics, from which is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism:—a well disciplined militia, our best reliance in peace, and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them:—the supremacy in the public expense, that labor may be lightly burthened:—the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith:—encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its hand-maid:—the diffusion of information, and arraignment of all abuses at the bar of the public reason:—freedom of religion; freedom of the press; and freedom of person, under the protection of the Habeas Corpus:—and trial by juries impartially selected. These principles form the bright constellation, which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and information. They should be the creed of our political faith; the text of civic instruction; the touch-stone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or of alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps, and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety.

I repair, then, fellow-citizens, to the post you have assigned me. With experience enough in subordinate offices to have seen the difficulties of this the greatest of all, I have learnt to expect that it will rarely fall to the lot of imperfect man to retire from this station with the reputation, and the favor, which bring him into it. Without pretensions to that confidence which you reposed in our first and greatest revolutionary character, whose pre-eminent services had entitled him to the first place



in his country's love, and destined for him the fairest page in the volume of faithful history. I ask so much confidence only, as may give firmness and effect to the legal administration of our affairs. I shall often go wrong through defect of judgment. When right, I shall often be thought wrong by those whose positions will not command a view of the whole ground. I ask your indulgence for my own errors, which will never be intentional; and your support against the errors of others, who may condemn what they would not if seen in all its parts. The approbation implied by your suffrage, is a great consolation to me for the past; and my future solicitude will be, to retain the good opinion of those who have bestowed it in advance, to conciliate that of others, by doing them all the good in my power, and to be instrumental to the happiness and freedom of all.

Relying then on the patronage of your good will, I advance with obedience to the work, ready to retire from it whenever you become sensible how much better choices it is in your power to make. And may that infinite power, which rules the destinies of the universe, lead our councils to what is best, and give them a favourable issue for your peace and prosperity.

5 March 1969

Dear Mr. Conkling:

Your undescribed broadside printing of the Inaugural Address of President Jefferson has come safely to hand. There is no question in our mind that this is a genuine contemporary edition of the address, but we have failed to locate any bibliographical description of what may well prove to be a unique printing. It would appear to have issued from a newspaper office, but it does not correspond to any that are known to have been issued. The heading of the first column is similar in text to that found preceding the text as printed in The National Intelligencer, issue for March 4, 1801, and published at Washington by Samuel Harrison Smith.

In the penultimate paragraph you will notice a few misprints in your copy, i.e. line 3 "o o f fics" for "offices"; line 9 "to that (high) confidence; and line 15, no pomma after history, but incorrectly a period.

We are retaining the original here until we receive word from you regarding its return shipment. If you are interested in offering this for sale, we would consider its acquisition at a price no greater than \$100.00.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick R. Goff Chief Rare Book Division



Mr. Roscoe P. Conkling 375 La Colina Drive Inglewood, California 90302

---

14 March 1969

Dear Mr. Conkling:

Your letter of March 10 was a delightful surprise. We are very happy, indeed, to learn that you and Mrs. Conkling wish to present the rare unique printing of President Jefferson's Inaugural Address to the Library of Congress.

I hasten to assure you both that this is a most welcome and highly appropriate acquisition for this Division.

I am now referring your letter to the Library's Exchange and Gift Division for the formal acknowledgment which such a gift requires.

Sincerely yours,

Frederick R. Goff Chief Rare Book Division

Mr. Roscoe P. Conkling 375 La Colina Drive Inglewood, California 90302

cc: Exchange and Gift Division

---